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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000851

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON MALAGASY PRIME MINISTER

REF: ANTANANARIVO 836

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Classified By: Ambassador R. Niels Marquardt for reasons 1.4 B,D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Charles Rabemananjara invited Ambassador Marquardt for a meeting the day after the credentials ceremony with the President. A friendly but direct Rabemananjara said Malagasy do not want a single ballot and the electoral commission is already strong and independent. Predictably the Prime Minister discussed the September 23 National Assembly election, the Madagascar Action Plan, and security concerns. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Prime Minister Rabemananjara warmly welcomed Ambassador Marquardt "chez nous" in Madagascar. He said Malagasy-U.S. relations were in good shape and expressed pride in the two governments' friendship.

"Our Democracy"

¶3. (SBU) Following cordial formalities, PM Rabemananjara spoke of "our democracy" in oddly defensive tones, volunteering that the Malagasy population does not want a single voting ballot; contrary to what he called the view put forth by the free but "manipulative" press. He stated that Madagascar's media prints anything and are out of control. Continuing to preempt U.S. (and donor community) positions on needed democratic reforms, the Prime Minister asserted that Madagascar's National Electoral Commission was "one of the most powerful in the region" and capable of fulfilling its obligations. Noting U.S. Embassy support to civil society, the Prime Minister accepted this role but cautioned against the political opposition's influence on NGOs. DCM Sibley assured that U.S. assistance was contingent on the complete political neutrality of our partners.

¶4. (SBU) The Prime Minister, who is simultaneously Minister of Interior responsible for elections, concluded his defense of Malagasy democracy saying results were reported within days of the recent presidential election and constitutional referendum - and that "seven of nine internationally-accepted electoral controls" were utilized to prevent fraud. He assured the September 23 National Assembly elections would be free and fair. Upon our departure, the Prime Minister

whispered to our Political FSN, whom he has known many years,  
"That is our response to the Charge's Fourth of July speech  
calling for democratic reforms."

#### Madagascar Action Plan

15. (U) The Prime Minister covered similar ground as the President (reftel) with regard to the Madagascar Action Plan, emphasizing it as a grass roots, iterative approach to development. PM Rabemananjara said he works closely with the Minister of Decentralization to push authority down to regional and local leaders. He invited the Ambassador to join him on field visits around Madagascar to see developments on the ground in rural areas.

#### Security Concerns

16. (C) The Prime Minister briefly mentioned security concerns and Madagascar's ungarded 5,000 km coastline. Repeating a comment the President made, he said several Pakistani drug traffickers were arrested recently in northern Madagascar. He requested assistance in coast guard and public security to police the island and combat terrorism and drug trafficking. The Ambassador noted a proposal for the U.S. to conduct a counternarcotics training program in the coming months.

COMMENT: Clear "No" to Political Reforms

17. (C) The Prime Minister, insisting on friendly relations, apologized for being "undiplomatic" and said his intention was for a meeting of substance, not just courtesy. His preemptive discussion of democratic reform confirms Post's views that the GOM is firmly closed to an independent

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electoral commission or single ballot. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT